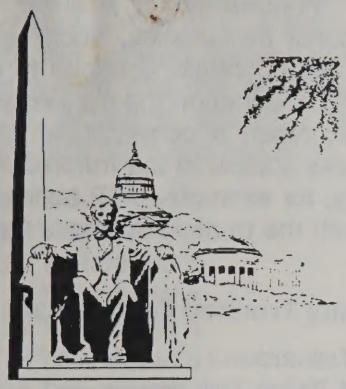

The CAPITOL HILL MONITOR

NOVEMBER 1993

AREA MOTOROLA PUBLIC SAFETY TRUNKED RADIO SYSTEMS

By Alan Henney

On Oct. 13, 1988, Anne Arundel County became the first Washington-Baltimore area local government to switch primary public safety communication to a trunked radio system. Anne Arundel County had set another area first almost 10 years earlier when it moved its county police department to the UHF-T band (470 to 512 MHz).

Today almost every radio-equipped Anne Arundel County agency, including the Annapolis police, now operate primarily on the multi-agency Motorola trunked radio system. The most noteworthy exceptions are the school board and the community college.

Motorola Trunked Systems - A Quick Overview

Since all systems featured in this article are Motorola trunked systems, several consistencies can be noted. Frequencies in Motorola trunked systems are customarily arranged in descending order by set (determined by the number to the right of the decimal). Frequencies within the sets are also arranged in descending order. For reference purposes, each frequency is then numbered, starting with the highest frequency of the trunk which receives the number "1." Refer to the Anne Arundel County example below.

In the "purest" of Motorola trunked systems, the central controller - the computer which controls every radio on the system - continuously transmits data to the radios on one of the first four frequencies (1 through 4). The central controller rotates among the first four frequencies, usually changing at midnight, to reduce the strain on any particular transmitter.

Frequencies 7, 8 and 9 are often dedicated to telephone interconnect in systems which offer such services. The FCC requires trunked system licensees to identify every 30 minutes on only the lowest frequency of the trunk (usually done in Morse code). This is known as the base station identifier (BSI).

Conventional repeater or simplex channels exist in some systems outside the trunk for special operations. In Alexandria, for example, police and fire units use 854.2125 while in the Metro tunnels. True trunking in the Metro tunnels requires underground transmitters on every frequency of the trunk (too expensive). Arlington and Frederick counties have channels reserved just for voice encryption. Again, if every frequency of the trunk were equipped with encryption, the cost will get expensive.

Most public safety systems, as in Anne Arundel County, designate several simplex channels, sometimes referred to as "talkaround" channels, for tactical communication for added flexibility. "Talkaround" channels operate outside of the trunked system and are frequently used for informal conversations between units in the field.

Now, let's take a brief look at a Motorola trunked system using Anne Arundel County as an example.

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

Radios used on Anne Arundel County's trunked system consist primarily of the popular Motorola STX "stick" portable and Syntor X 9000E mobile. Unlike many other

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Motorola systems, the four central controller frequencies in the Anne Arundel County system (the .4125 increments) seldom, if ever, carry voice communication (when not transmitting data from the central controller). As a result, voice channels are restricted to 10 frequencies (the .3625 and .3875 increments). This makes scanning the system somewhat easier since scanner listeners don't have to constantly unlock the previous day's control channel.

A Sample Trunked Radio Configuration

Channel designations used by trunked system users, unfortunately, are almost useless to scanner listeners, since channel designations are pseudo-randomly assigned to an available voice frequency at a particular moment. In Anne Arundel County for example, the trunked system might assign the fire dispatch channel (1-A) to 856.3625 during one conversation and then 858.3875 will be assigned to channel 1-A for the next conversation.

Anne Arundel County fire radios have access to 20 different "logical" channels - each referred to phonetically. For example, "Respond on Echo" requests the units to switch radios to channel 1-E. "Meet me on Oscar" requires the specified unit to switch the radio to channel 1-O. Each county agency has its own channel plan. Besides voice communication, Anne Arundel's trunked system carries data used by the fire apparatus status/ message encoders.

AAFD Trunked Radio Channel Plan

1-A DISP 1 Dispatch (Simulcasts 154.01)
1-B TACT 2 Tactical (Simulcasts 154.34)
1-C TACT 3 Tactical
1-D FLD COM 4 Field Command
1-E TACT 5 Tactical
1-F TACT 6 Tactical
1-G COMMAND 7 Command Channel
1-H MUTUAL 8 Mutual Aid (Simulcasts 154.28)
1-I MUTUAL 9 Mutual Aid
1-J MUTUAL 10 Mutual Aid
1-K TACT 11 Tactical
1-L TACT 12 Tactical
1-M COMMAND 13 Command Channel
1-N ADMIN 14 Administrative
1-O MEET ME 15 Meet (speak to) me on Oscar
1-P DYN-RGP 16 Dynamic Regrouping
2-O POLICE 17 Coordination with Police
3-O GEN-CTY 33 General County
7-TA F/P 97 Talk-Around (Shared Fire/Police) (854.5875)
8-TA FIRE 98 Talk-Around (Fire Only) (854.4125)

As mentioned earlier, frequencies used for talkaround communication, such as AAFD's 7-TA and 8-TA, exist outside the trunked system and remain consistently on the same frequency. Fortunately for scanner listeners, some older conventional frequencies, such as the fire dispatch and mutual aid channels, continue to simulcast with the corresponding channel on the trunked system. In addition, many trunks retain a conventional channel to allow non-trunked users access to the trunked system. In Anne Arundel County, for example, MSP helicopters use 154.34 to interface with the trunked system's fire channel 1-B.

Anne Arundel County Trunked Frequencies

854.4125 T/A-8 Fire Talk-around
854.5875 T/A-7 Fire & Police Talk-around
854.7375 T/A-9 Police Talk-around
860.4125 (1) Control
859.4125 (2) Control
858.4125 (3) Control
857.4125 (4) Control
856.4125 (5) Inactive
860.3875 (6) Voice
859.3875 (7) Voice
858.3875 (8) Voice
857.3875 (9) Voice
856.3875 (10) Voice
860.3625 (11) Voice
859.3625 (12) Voice
858.3625 (13) Voice
857.3625 (14) Voice
856.3625 (15) Voice/BSI

Baltimore County

In February of 1991 a Motorola Advanced SmartNet II trunked radio network became fully functional for all of Baltimore County. Ten strategically located antenna sites, ranging in height from 200 to 600 feet, provide overlapping coverage throughout the county. Most county public safety agencies, with a few exceptions, have switched operations entirely to the trunked system. In addition to two-way voice communication, the trunked system also supports the police department's AVL (automatic vehicle locator) system and Motorola KDT480 MDTs (mobile data terminals) installed in fire and police vehicles.

Many parallels exist between Anne Arundel County's trunked system and Baltimore County's trunked system. Both systems, for example, use Motorola STX portable radios, simulcast fire alerting on the former dispatch channel (46.46/154.01 for Baltimore County), retained a second fire channel for trunked system interface (46.28/ 154.34-Baltimore County), and use several 800 MHz simplex conventional channels for trunked system "talkaround." In addition, the Baltimore County police retained 39.56 to allow non-trunked users, such as MSP troopers, to interface with the system.

Under loaded conditions, 858.2125 and 857.2125, generally allocated for data operation, can be allocated

for voice operation. Eight proposed 800 MHz conventional channels may or may not be used in conjunction with the trunked system or may be a separate trunked system. The proposed system will operate on 852.8125, 853.0375, 853.2375, 853.5625, 853.7375, 854.0375, 854.3375 and 854.5625.

852.9125 Talkaround 1
853.0125 Talkaround 2
853.2125 Talkaround 3
853.4125 Talkaround 4
854.2125 Talkaround 5
853.5875 Talkaround 6
853.8375 Talkaround 7
854.0125 Talkaround 8
860.9625 (1) Control/Voice
859.9625 (2) Control/Voice
858.9625 (3) Control/Voice
857.9625 (4) Control/Voice
856.9625 (5) Voice
860.7125 (6) Voice
859.7125 (7) Voice/Interconnect
858.7125 (8) Voice/Interconnect
857.7125 (9) Voice/Interconnect
856.7125 (10) Voice
860.4625 (11) Voice
859.4625 (12) Voice
858.4625 (13) Voice
857.4625 (14) Voice
856.4625 (15) Voice
860.2125 (16) Data
859.2125 (17) Data
858.2125 (18) Data/Voice
857.2125 (19) Data/Voice
856.2125 (20) Voice/BSI

FREDERICK COUNTY

The Frederick County Sheriff's Department was among the first county radio users to switch operations to Frederick County's trunked system. After switching, sheriff's officers soon experienced dead spots caused by the mountains which the 800 MHz signals just couldn't propagate. In an effort to increase coverage, the county installed two conventional channels on 851.8375 and 854.9875 which simulcast the sheriff's dispatch from the trunked system. This may be a temporary patch pending implementation of additional trunked system sites. Any thoughts?

851.8375 Conventional, Sheriff's Dispatch (North)
854.7125 Conventional
854.9875 Conventional, Sheriff's Dispatch (South)
860.4875 (1) Control/Voice
859.4875 (2) Control/Voice
858.4875 (3) Control/Voice
857.4875 (4) Control/Voice
856.4875 (5) BSI/Encryption

In addition to the above trunked system, Frederick County has received a license for more frequencies provided by the Region 20 NPSPAC plan (National Public Safety Planning Advisory Committee). The plan provides the county with the following frequencies: 866.6125, 866.9125, 868.225, 868.475 and 868.75; and mutual aid frequencies of 866.0125, 866.5125, 867.0125, 867.5125 and 868.0125. We'll cover the NPSPAC frequencies (866 to 869 MHz band) in greater detail in a future newsletter.

Alexandria

In northern Virginia, Alexandria became the first jurisdiction to switch public safety communications to a trunked radio system. By July of 1989, after months of severe radio problems, Alexandria's $4 million multi-agency Motorola Smartnet I trunked radio network finally became functional for the entire city. Because of serious dead spots, a second antenna site was installed. Antenna sites at the Mark Winkler Building and the Masonic Temple now provide overlapping coverage throughout the city.

860.8375 (1) Control/Voice
859.8375 (2) Control/Voice
858.8375 (3) Control/Voice
857.8375 (4) Control/Voice
856.8375 (5) Interconnect
855.5625 (6) Voice
854.4875 (7) Voice/BSI
855.5125 FMARS Patch/Fire Back-Up (Conventional)
854.2125 Braddock Rd Metro Tunnel Link (Conventional)

ARLINGTON COUNTY

Just this year Arlington County fire and police departments shifted primary radio communications to a $12 million four-site Motorola Smartnet II trunked system. The county plans to continue to simulcast the police and fire dispatch channels on the original dispatch frequencies, 154.13 and 453.825.

All county agencies, except for the school system, have moved primary communications to the trunked system. Arlington returned five of the 20 channels (856 to 860.4875) originally licensed to the county when the school board opted to retain its existing radio system.

A statewide trunked system licensed to Virginia's Department of Information Technology (DIT) was allocated 10 of Arlington's trunked channels (856 to 860.7625 and 856 to 860.9375). These 10 channels, originally licensed to DIT's Falls Church site, appear to have been transferred to Arlington County.

Arlington County's trunk functions similarly to the other Motorola systems featured in this article. Unlike the other systems, however, the central controller transmits its data on the set with lowest increment (856 to 860.4375). Three of the 15 trunked channels will ultimately provide communication in Arlington's 12 miles of Metro tunnels using the leaky coax installed by Bell Atlantic (anyone know which three channels?).

860.4375 Control/Voice
859.4375 Control/Voice
858.4375 Control/Voice
857.4375 Control/Voice
856.4375 Voice/BSI
860.7625 Voice
859.7625 Voice
858:7625 Encryption
857.7625 Encryption
856.7625 Special Use
860.9375 Voice
859.9375 Voice
858.9375 Voice
857.9375 Voice
856.9375 Voice

Looking into the Future

Unfortunately, almost every area jurisdiction has plans for a trunked radio system in coming years. One of the biggest difficulties has been obtaining frequencies from the FCC. As mentioned earlier, the FCC established the NPSPAC to coordinate the newer 866 to 869 MHz band which has been set aside exclusively for public safety communications. We intend to feature the NPSPAC frequency allocations for the Washington-Baltimore area, Region 20, in a coming newsletter. Stay tuned!

Jack Anderson, Chuck Hutchinson, John Korman and Bill Staubs contributed to this article.

ADDENDA-Federal Systems

by Bill Hardman

The Federal Government, both civilian and military departments, have begun employing trunked radio systems. The major difference between them and the systems described above is the frequency allocation. The Federal Systems are located in the 400 to 420 band of the spectrum. In order to make life more complicated, they do not follow set numeric frequency patterns as do the non-Federal systems. The two systems below will illustrate the point. However, other than these pattern and frequency range differences, the systems operate the same.

At least two trunked systems have been detected operating in the Washington area. Both are "officially" licensed to the NTIA in Springfield. (This seems to be the policy with trunked systems, except for those being used by agencies of the Department of Defense, including the service departments. The intent seems tc be that this will allow multi-agency users.) The first system is used primarily by the Central Inteiligence Agency and State Department for orientation and training. As with many of the Federal Systems, it consists of only five primary output frequencies, to wit: 406.2000, 406.3000, 406.5250, 407.9500, 409.2500.. Unfortunately, this system (as most newly procured conventional and trunked systems for the Federal Government) is equipped with encryption devices. Encryption is heavily employed on this system. The second system is being employed by the security guards of the Department of Health and Human Services. The output frequencies for this system are 406.25, 406.85, 408.45, 408.70, and 408.90. The input frequencies are 414.925, 416.275, 418.025, 418.425, and 419.775.

As a side note in the for what it's worth department, the Navy now has a standard trunked system for its major ports. When a ship docks at a pier, the crew plugs into the standard system, for example at Norfolk. When they put in at Jacksonville and reach the pier, they plug into the system there, both, of course with identical input and output frequncies. There have been reports of this system, or another trunked system, operating at Patuxent River NAS. Anybody know anything about it?

* * *

FIRE BUFFS CONFUSE SCANNED LISTENERS WITH NEW REPEATER

Competition Leads to Two Fire Buff Nets - with Twice the Action?

Metropolitan Radio Service (AKA Metro Area Radio Group) is a second public safety incident notification system which started Oct. 11 on 462.0 [107.2 Hz]. The story behind the new notification system, to say the least, is complex.

Several years ago WUSA's overnight photographer Sheldon R. Levy started the Citywide fire buff's repeater on 462.15 [103.5 Hz]. Fire buffs, in spite of the repeater's poor coverage and numerous other users, quickly took to the system - the only such radio notification system then in Washington.

Another group of fire buffs, led primarily by Paul Bowling and Ken Mezger (the former PSN secretary who is no longer with PSN), established the Public Safety Network (PSN) paging system in January, 1993. PSN dispatchers page fire buffs and media personnel, who carry alphanumeric pagers, of noteworthy incidents.

Months after PSN started, in order to better serve the Baltimore community, Firefighter/Inspector Chuck Hutchinson created Baltimore Metro Dispatch (BMD) - another paging service similar to PSN but with an emphasis on local fire reporting.

Because Sheldon was not originally interested in improving the Citywide repeater, some PSN members charge, the PSN board elected to start a competing system on 462.0 which would allow PSN users to obtain better repeater range not available through the Citywide system. In defense of Sheldon, fire buffs Walter Gold and Vito Maggiolo maintain that the opportunity to move Citywide from one community repeater to another wouldn't have made a significant improvement.

While PSN members negotiated for the 75-watt 462.0 repeater, Sheldon mailed a letter to Citywide members on Sept. 21 in which he announced plans to move Citywide to a privately-owned repeater on a different frequency. "There's no way," reads his letter, "to expand our current frequency's range or diminish the activity of the other users who share the frequency 'Citywide' now rents."

In his letter Sheldon says "'Citywide' will continue to operate on the present rented frequency [462.15] and private line code [103.5 Hz] for a few more months. However, licensing applications have been prepared and preparations are underway to obtain and install our own repeater operation on a new frequency [a license is pending for 452.975 and 453.0] and at a new site. Due to escalating problems with our current system we do not plan to utilize the services of any rented community repeater operations in the future."

Citywide, Walter notes, is in the "final stages of negotiations" to place a 75-watt Motorola repeater at the WRC-TV tower on 452.975 and possibly on 453.0 as well. Since both frequencies are from the relay press radio service, Walter's Washington News Network (WNN) is expected to be the licensee. WNN news crews (which currently use 464.4) and Citywide members will likely share use of the repeater(s) and probably the cost. Walter says he sees the system operating at a "considerable downscale price during the first year" for Citywide members, with WNN picking up most of the maintenance costs.

In Washington other users on 452.975 include CNN engineering [127.3 Hz], Time Magazine [DCS 134] and USA Today photographers [192.8 Hz]. CNN's assignment desk operates primarily on 453.0 [127.3 Hz].

Regardless of which frequency the Citywide repeater will transmit on, fire buffs point out that at the present time Citywide will continue to be the official home for the Friendship Fire Association's canteen unit - DCFD Car 5.

Also in his letter, Sheldon writes he is in the process of establishing "FireCom," an "alphanumeric pager notification system limited to fires and related fire department incidents in the Metropolitan area." Perhaps a Washington version of BMD?

After months of planning, PSN officially unveiled the Metropolitan Radio Service on 462.0 on Oct. 11. The unveiling was around the same time that Sheldon publicly announced plans to overhaul the existing Citywide repeater notification system. The PSN repeater system costs members $6.75 a month, $1.75 more than what Citywide currently charges, but offers excellent coverage and fewer co-channel users.

When Citywide switches frequencies, Sheldon says they "anticipate adjusting the monthly dues [currently $5] as may be required to cover operating expenses and service costs." Walter notes that the dues could decrease, at least for the first year, since WNN is expected to share the system as well.

Both systems presently lease the repeaters from Dispatch Communications (Discom). As an interesting note, fire buffs frequently use the National Capital REACT Incorporated (NCRI) repeater, 462.675, which is often referred to as channel 2 or the "other channel."

Need more information? To contact a representative of PSN or the Metropolitan Radio Service call 301-701-PSN4 or 202-943-5747. For details on the BMD paging system, contact BMD's Metromedia liaison, Ms. Richards, at 410-750-4011. Call Vito Maggiolo at 301-588-0123 for information on Citywide. No official contact information was available for FireCom as of this writing.

Both the PSN and Citywide groups intend to offer competitive paging and repeater notification networks to the same audience. Changes have occurred so rapidly that many fire buffs are wondering what the future could possibly have in store for them. While no one knows for sure, one thing is for certain: only time will tell.

* * *

CONGRESS ALLOWS DISTRICT TO CLOSE ENGINE COMPANY 3

"Visitors to the District's oldest fire station, two blocks north of the Capitol, can see the scars from an ongoing fight between senators and city officials," reads the lead of a recent Washington Post article.

For years, the Post notes, the city proposed closing the station at 439 New Jersey Ave NW, saying the city lacks the money for repairs and that nearby stations provide enough protection. Each year Congress, however, overrules the proposal and passes legislation to keep Engine 3 stationed a few seconds from its chambers.

According to the Post, it costs the District an estimated $1 million a year to operate Engine 3, which is the first-due engine to the US Capitol.

Gene Lichtman, the fire department's historian, says the earliest date the station could be closed is Nov. 4, provided the 1994 version of the DC appropriations bill passes Congress and is signed by the president. Personnel and equipment will likely be relocated to other stations. The building status is uncertain at this time, but Gene says "it would make a nice museum."

Besides housing Engine 3, the 77-year-old building at 439 New Jersey Ave NW houses Ambulance 15, a reserve truck and an antique horse-drawn engine.

* * *

MPD DEPLOYS ITS VIOLENT CRIME & GANG TASK FORCE

On Oct. 1 Chief Fred Thomas' new Violent Crime & Gang Task Force took to the streets of the department's Seventh District - where it has spent most of its time since.

The mission of the task force, indicates an MPD press release, is to "identify, arrest and successfully prosecute those individuals, gangs and organizations involved in violent crimes such as homicides and assaults with firearms."

The task force, headquartered at the FBI facility at 1900 Half St. SW, is composed of MPD officers, FBI, ATF and DEA agents. The task force consists primarily of four teams: the Criminal Information Services Team (selects targets and coordinates investigations); Tactical Operations Team (targets individuals responsible for more than one violent offense and consists of the Rapid Deployment Unit and officers from the Repeat Offenders Unit); Gang Investigative Team (targets and investigates gangs); and the Violent Crime Response Team (responds to assaults with dangerous weapons and assaults with intent to kill cases to immediately initiate an investigation).

After closely monitoring MPD's Seventh District, task force radio designations are slowly becoming evident. The VCRT van, which is frequently shown on newscasts, identifies as Cruiser 340. Cruiser 341 appears to be closely affiliated with the van, perhaps the VCRT commander.

Task force officers appear to frequently label themselves as "VCRT" units, even if they come from one of the other four teams of the task force. Task force officers identify using cruiser numbers between 1400 and 1439, with cruiser numbers below 1410 reserved for high-ranking officers (such as "Cruiser 1402"). A second batch of cruiser numbers used by the task force runs between 440 and 479. These two different sets might suggest a separation based upon the four teams. Any thoughts?

Radio numbers used by task force officers appear to come from the 9000s, with numbers below 9100 being the most common (such as "Radio 9033"). Some officers just identify as "VRT" with a numeric suffix (such as "VRT 91"). Could these be the former RDU officers? The task force is most active at night, mostly on the Seventh District's channel, 460.475. SOD units (also at night) supplement patrol officers in selected neighborhoods throughout the city on 460.275.

DC NATIONAL GUARD AIDS MPD

As noted in many newscasts, the DC National Guard already has personnel assisting MPD. Guard units have been rarely monitored on MPD frequencies. When Guard personnel use MPD frequencies, whether on the ground or in the air, they commonly identify using "Guard" followed by a number.

Of the 3,700 DC Guard members, a Guard spokesman told the Washington Post, about 500 are qualified to serve as military police and have training in military law. Guard members in the past have helped MPD with lighting, repairing patrol cars, air support, traffic control and during special events such as the Inauguration. So far, the only frequencies we know of for the DC National Guard are 141.225 for the MP Battalion and 52.75 for the aviation unit. The main armory is at Anacostia, but the aviation unit is based at Davison Army Airfield in Virginia. The aviation unit has used both its UH-1's and Blackhawks to support MPD, primarily at night. Keep the 138 to 144 MHz band in mind should more Guard members take to the streets.

OCDETF CORRECTION

In the September OCDETF newsletter article we mentioned that 164.55 is a USCG allocation. What we failed to mention is that the input to the 164.55 repeater, 168.8625, is actually a Justice Department frequency.

On February 25, 1986, says our Tidewater friend Larry Kumjian, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the three entities. Larry says according to the MOU, the USCG, Justice and Treasury Departments agree to share the use of their respective frequencies with OCDE (that's the way its abbreviated in the MOU) operations. Each entity, Larry notes, continues to have unrestricted use of its frequency for normal operations. "Just for the record," Larry says, most law enforcement personnel which he deals with pronounce the acronym "oh-si-def."

SHADOW TRAFFIC UPDATES

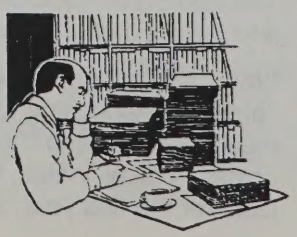
We only have a few new items to report regarding Shadow traffic. As mentioned in the last newsletter, Shadow is currently working out of the WTOP studios using the WTOP frequencies (450.35 and 455.65). The only clients Shadow has so far in the area are WTOP-AM1500, sister-station WASH-FM97.1 and WKCW-AM1420 in Warrenton.

The Shadow airplane, formerly leased to Metro Traffic Control, identifies as 1-8-Hotel. Shadow traffic reporters were testing a 900 MHz Motorola trunked radio system, but are expected to remain on the WTOP channels for the time being.

* * *

NEWSSCAN

by Brent Baker



METRO DROPS RADIOS FOR CELLULAR. Metro buses may soon carry cellular phones instead of mobile radios for driver-to-dispatcher communications. An early September Fairfax Journal story reported that the Metro board was "expected to approve advertising for a contract that would put phones on 165 of the 1,500 Metrobuses on the road in the Washington area for a one-year trial." The Journal story continued: "The radio system now in use in Metro's buses is aging, according to Metro board member Mary Margaret Whipple. Estimates for a new radio system ranged from $10 million to $15 million, Whipple said."

Stuart Crump, editor of the Cellular Sales & Marketing Newsletter, explained the obvious drawback: "One disadvantage of cellular is that it is one-to-one. You can't talk to 25 buses at once." Other high-tech forms of communication, Crump told the Journal, are available that could be more flexible than cellular phones. Buses in Washington and Maryland will get the test phones equipped with a silent alarm.

COPS ON SHARKS. Fairfax County Police have begun patrolling the Occoquan River using "Tigersharks," one-man mini-boats that are similar to a jet-ski. Two officers were assigned to the new Tigersharks in early August and used them through early September.

A Sept. 23 "Virginia Weekly" section article in The Washington Post explained what led to the patrol: "Fairfax County police started patrolling the Occoquan in a motorboat five years ago. Until then, the Occoquan was virtually unpoliced. Prince William County, which shares jurisdiction of the river with Fairfax, does not assign any of its police officers to patrol the waters, and officers from the state's Fish and Wildlife Department are rarely seen. But the 20-foot Fairfax police boat could not be used in parts of the river system" which are too shallow.

The $5,500 Tigersharks, which the manufacturer donated the county, assisted in 15 arrests, 10 for DWI, during the one-month trial. "'They have been really successful,' said Lt. Mike Lomonaco, commander of the special operations division, which includes the marine unit. 'If it's up to me, I'm going to go ahead with them again next year.'" But one county supervisor, who says state and Coast Guard officials should police the river, opposes continued funding for the marine unit which costs $30,000 a year. Does anyone know how well the 800 MHz portables operate from the low-land river and how the officers identify?

A THIRD HELICOPTER. Fairfax police want "to spend about $1.5 million to replace a helicopter that crashed last summer because of pilot error," reported an Oct. 7 Washington Post "Fairfax Weekly" story. "The two-year-old Bell 204L3 long-range helicopter, one of three helicopters in the police department's fleet, crashed moments after takeoff on Aug. 24 because its crew failed to notice that it was still plugged into a battery unit on the ground." Insurance will cover $900,000 with "assets seized in drug cases to make up the $600,000 difference."

Several county supervisors doubt the need for a third copter, but the Post reported "Police officials also explain the need for three helicopters by saying that one helicopter often is 'down' for routine maintenance. Moreover, they said, one of their remaining two helicopters is a two-seater, which can't be used to transport accident victims." Over the summer, the "helicopters flew on 447 non-traffic and non-medical missions... resulting in 24 felony arrests, 28 misdemeanor arrests, one recovered automobile and the location of five missing people." Operating three copters would cost $1.4 million in 1994, about $1 million of that would go for salaries.

FAIRFAX COUNTY WANTS MORE COPS. Just a few weeks after the Montgomery County police chief requested more officers (see September issue), the Fairfax County chief did the same. An Oct. 9 Washington Post article described Chief Michael Young's request to add 153 officers between 1995 and 1998. The force "is authorized for 980 officers" and currently has 46 vacancies with 135 eligible to retire by the end of the year.

Young's $9.5 million proposal "would add 153 officers during a three-year period beginning with 78 officers in July 1995 and phasing in 35 and then 40 more in successive years." The Post reported that according to Justice Department figures, "the national average is 2.4 officers for every 1,000 people. In Fairfax, the ratio is 1.2 for every 1,000."

FAIRFAX CITY POLICE PLAN BIKE PATROL. The patrol will not be ready as a unit for several months, states a Fairfax Journal article sent to us from Ken Fowler. "Unlike other area bicycle patrols," says the article, "Fairfax City bicycle officers will not be assigned full-time to bicycle duty. They will patrol by bike during their daily exercise period - usually 60 to 90 minutes." Bicycle officers, a spokesperson told the Journal, will be "armed and will carry handcuffs and radios." In addition to patrols the officers may assist in drug enforcement activities.

TORNADO HURTS STATE POLICE COMMUNICATIONS. The August tornado in the Petersburg area caused so many people to use their cellular phones that the Virginia State Police were unable to make cellular calls. An Associated Press story carried by the Oct. 10 Washington Times reported that "in the aftermath of the Aug. 6 tornadoes, callers in the Petersburg area made 26,000 attempts to use the Contel Cellular system during a two-hour period. The company could process only 13,000 of the calls. State police were without cellular communications for 90 minutes."

The culprit: the media. Bobby Johnson, director of the telecommunications division in Virginia's Department of Information Technology charged: "A lot of news media... essentially blocked the trunk... TV crews will dial a particular number and rather than disconnect, they'll just leave the system open, tied up." At the request of the Virginia's Department of Emergency Services, "Contel is

working with AT&T on developing a software system to give priority to phones in emergency vehicles."

This just shows that public safety agencies should never get so carried away with a shared system that they rely on it more than an independent, exclusively-maintained-for-their-use, two-way communications system!

FCC TO AUCTION AIRWAVES. In a major decision on Sept. 23, the FCC voted 2 to 1 to auction 120 MHz of spectrum for new wireless services. The New York Times summarized the new scheme: "The plan would carve the nation into 51 oddly shaped regions with 492 subdivisions. Two licenses will be granted for each of the 51 regions, covering all of California, for example, or big chunks of the densely populated Northeast. Each of the 492 subdivisions, roughly corresponding to individual metropolitan markets, would receive up to five licenses. A rich company or group of companies would be able to bid for a nationwide license by combining bids for a license in each region."

Current cellular operators can bid for the new spectrum, but can only bid for "an extra 10 MHz in each market, while other new entrants will be able to bid on as much as 40 MHz." Specifically, The Washington Times reported: "Two licenses of 30 MHz each will be issued in the 47 major trading areas... One license of 20 MHz will be issued in each of the 487 basic trading areas. Four licenses of 10 MHz each will be issued in the 487 basic areas."

Personal Communications Services (PCS) are expected to be the first users of the new spectrum. In a PCS system, portable phones transmitting with 0.1 to 0.6 watts can be used in an area covering a neighborhood, city block or building.

In addition to the 120 MHz up for auction, The Washington Times noted that the FCC decided to set aside 40 MHz for private use, "such as hospitals or hotels whose workers will carry small phones inside the building." The Times also explained that the "Washington-Baltimore major area ranges form Maryland's Atlantic coast to the state's northern tip and to south of Charlottesville. It encompasses about 8 million people. Within the major area are eight basic trading areas."

WIRELESS MICS HAVE DRAWBACKS. WTTG-TV's weather lady Hillary Howard, says the Oct. 6 Washington Times, was one of several local personalities who "took the 'Three-Hour Tour' aboard the Spirit of Washington... Anyway, Hillary was hooked up with a microphone that allowed her to beam her weather forecast to Channel 5's viewers. It was during one of her breaks that nature summoned Hillary to the powder room. Hillary went as called, but in doing so she forgot to turn off her mike... there was a polite chuckle or two, or seven, back at the Channel 5 control room, where the innocent eavesdroppers were encouraged to take a quick coffee break."

* * *

Please address all correspondence to Alan. We encourage readers to submit material and to write articles which relate to the hobby. All submissions are subject to editing for both style and content. When submitting material please make certain we have your phone number should we have any questions. We welcome frequency and visitor requests, but please include a SASE.

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The Capitol Hill Monitor is the non-profit monthly newsletter of the Capitol Hill Monitors. The newsletter keeps scanner enthusiasts abreast of local meetings, frequency profiles and other topics of interest. Dues (which includes 12 issues) are $8. Kindly make checks payable to Alan Henney.

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Capitol Hill Monitor's Scanner/Shortwave Net:

Listen for the CHM net, hosted by Ken Fowler, at 7:30 p.m. on the first and third Monday of each month on 146.91 MHz.

Frequency Forum Computer Bulletin Board:

We encourage computer users to log onto Jack Anderson's Frequency Forum computer BBS at 703-207-9622 (8-N-1). Frequency Forum is the official electronic gathering place for readers of the Capitol Hill Monitor!

DISTRICT AND FAIRFAX COUNTY GET NEW FIRE CHANNELS

We have two last minute updates as we go to press this month. On Nov. 3 DC fire placed 800 MHz channel 4, 852.7375 [127.3 Hz], into operation. This is a more permanent version of the same channel temporarily used during the 1993 Inauguration. DC fire intends to use the channel for medical consultations between EMS units and hospitals (refer to the May, 1993 CHM newsletter for details).

Fairfax County fire, says Frequency Forum's Jack Anderson, is installing 460.125 [94.8 Hz] as fire channel 6. 460.125 was a former Fairfax County police channel.

The repeater for 460.125, Jack notes, is at the WRC tower on Nebraska Avenue NW - also used by WTMW (AKA Channel 14). Apparently, Jack says, Channel 14 agreed to install the repeater to address mobile desense interference complaints from Fairfax County fire. The new repeater supplies a strong signal to some of the northeastern areas of Fairfax County affected by Channel 14. The radio shop was testing the new repeater on Nov. 5. Mobile radios are currently being programmed with the new channel.

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